

HOW'S ABOUT

By JOHN

IT'S FANTASTIC. It's fabulous. It's a powerhouse. Jack Charlton, pride of the North East, brings his Middlesbrough stars down to Bucks for the third round of the F.A. Cup and thinks that he has the shooting rights over Loakes Park.

Alas, or should we say, cheers, all goes wrong for big Jack and his boys. The Press and the media have played up that Loakes Park slope so much that it begins to look like the side of a house to Middlesbrough.

Charlton's champions find themselves right up on the main stand side of the ground, firing powerhouse shots all over the hospital building and into the London Transport depot.

Six balls are lost in the first half, and the referee has to borrow the ball which was autographed by the teams after the Bournemouth game, which the Free Press is giving away as a prize.

The Free Press sets up an emergency ball autographing service just to keep the supply going.

But back to the big match. In the second half a harmless but hefty looking goalkick from John Maskell is wafted along by a bit of a whirlwind from the Wheeler End Common direction. It heads up the slope, takes a dramatic turn from the direction of Tom Burt's Hill, and wham. Wycombe are in the fourth round at second bounce.

The football experts are absolutely confounded by such an amazing goal.

Jimmy Hill does a double beard waggle (as opposed to the Ali shuffle) on the box and tells B.B.C. viewers that meteorologists have put it down to a sudden upsurge of wind from a secret American Base in Dawes Hill Lane, which caused the unexpected cross-current around the hospital skyscraper building, producing this dramatic swerve and goal.

Other experts call it Maskell Magic or the Banana Split. In fact in next to no time Don Revie is urged to play John Maskell in the England side — at centre-forward.

So its awa' the lads for big Jackie and onto the next round. The cup draw is on Match of the Day again, live on the box. Sam Boulton, Ted Croker and Co. get so excited that they drop all the balls and the draw rapidly degenerates into a game of marbles.

The Wanderers come out of it all practically last, which is not surprising, because their ball is not found in the bag, but in the turn-up of Jimmy Hill's trousers. Anyway, they make it — Arsenal at home.

The Gunners' manager, Bertie Mee, sends out hordes of spies because Wycombe happens to be on the bus route from London. These agents are even on duty at the Post Office trying to check up the percentage of people who are putting Wycombe down to win on their football coupon.

The Press and T.V. are practically living full-time in the town.

Owing to the shortage of hotel accommodation thereabouts they have set up their own marquee on the Rye and they spend best part of their time up at Loakes Park, turning over every sod (literally speaking of course).

One gent from Fleet Street, looking for a different angle from David and Goliath, suddenly reveals that Wycombe Rye is really a type of whisky. Several bottles of it are collected from the Dyke, the indulgents sup it, go sick and get a grandstand view of the big match from the hospital building.

Actually those who miss it do not miss much. Arsenal, so concerned with the Loakes Park slope, which is now put at one-in-three, attempt to train on Snowden and turn up lop-sided and frost bitten.

And they are so busy looking out for a Maskell Magic Shot or the Double Banana, that they forget Bodger's Boomerang, our secret weapon, and the Wanderers are in round five.

By now Loakes Park is the hub of the football world. Americans are sending dollars galore for slices of the hallowed turf (others ask, 'Who is this guy Disraeli?'), but the Wanderers refuse to part, they are frightened that they might level up their famous slope.

Oh, did we forget to mention, Liverpool are the next visitors? They threaten to take the town apart.

Wanderers' manager, Brian Lee, is so besieged that Marlow Magistrates have to sit at Bisham Abbey so that he can do his duty as a Justice of the Peace in peace.

The digging keeps going on to find something fresh to say about this 'new' football team, which suddenly everyone has discovered.

Someone finds out that before he became chairman of the Wanderers, Jack Smethurst used to run the Bucks Police team. So they manage to bring back eleven ex-local coppers out of retirement to play a match against the National Press and the Television as a pipe opener.

Our ex-policemen are still wonderful and remarkably tolerant. They only arrest three reporters.

As we said, Liverpool threaten to take Loakes Park to bits. They never get a chance. Because of traffic jams almost as far as Aylesbury and Oxford they cannot get within three miles of Loakes Park for the game and they have to run the rest of the way, changing as they go. They never recover.

Now its the semi-final, Wolves at Leicester. So much is the enthusiasm for

the local Wanderers that when they play at Marlow in a Mid-week floodlight game in March, you cannot get into the Davis Memorial Ground for television cameras and reporters.

Big business has cashed in on the success story. Birdseye sign on our Paul as a pea-spotter, that's natural. Wycombe's Mead is reckoned to be the strongest brew, or you can buy a Searle Suite or a Reardon Rug. Panorama shows shots of "Bodger" Horseman knocking up chairs for the Common Market.

Jack Smethurst interviews Michael Parkinson on that gent's show and does almost as well as Muhammad Ali

Prayers are said in all churches for the success of the Wanderers. Harold Wilson becomes an extra honorary President at Wycombe as a tribute to what they did to his team from close to his Huyton Constituency.

All routes are studied to get the fans to Leicester. Many supporters have a dummy run on the previous Sunday, causing traffic jams all along the M.1.

Enterprising Wycombe manufacturers erect and archway of chairs in Filbert Street, outside Leicester City's ground, something which is usually reserved for Royalty.

The Wanderers lose to Rivets Sports, Aylesbury in the final of the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup over Easter and the pundits begin to ask . . . are they cracking? Are they folding up at the edges? Is their slip showing? They'll never get up the Motorway!

But they do . . . don't tell me how; and now they are in the Wembley final (of course they have been there before in the Amateur Cup).

And who are their opponents? Why, wonder of wonders, Leatherhead, their Isthmian League friends from Surrey.

They have bewildered Brighton and Hove Albion, bewitched Burnley, bothered Birmingham and so on and here they are.

And so it is just another Rothman's Isthmian League encounter, Wanderers v Leatherhead, whoever would have thought of that!

They meet in a league match the previous Saturday before a crowd of seven hundred and seventy three.

"We confidently expect more people to be present at Wembley next week," predicts Jimmy Hill, while World of Sport, having filmed the whole proceedings, are considering doing a bit of dubbing and scene mixing and running it on Cup Final Saturday ten minutes before the real match, just to foil the B.B.C. Oh God Our Help in Ages Past!

Well, after all that, who won? Sorry, we don't know. This was where we woke up. We really must go easy on the Christmas pudding in future.